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THE IMPORTANCE
OF A
THOROUGH AND ADEQUATE COURSE
OF
PREPARATORY STUDY
FOR
THE HOLY MINISTRY.

✓
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THE IMPORTANCE

OF A THOROUGH AND ADEQUATE

PREPARATORY STUDY FOR THE HOLY MINISTRY.

MR. EDITOR,—

When I reflect on the importance of giving sound and judicious advice to *any* young man, just entering on the career of life, I can scarcely express my sense of the responsibility of one who undertakes the task. But, when I contemplate the greatly augmented importance of giving a correct impulse to the mind of a youth who is destined to be a leader and guide of others, on the most momentous of all subjects; who is training up to be a “watchman on the walls of Zion;” to be a ruler, teacher, and counsellor in the Church of God; my mind is really so impressed, as to be almost ready to sink under the weight of the undertaking. Surely, he who can venture upon it without much reflection and much prayer; without pondering well every counsel, and looking to the Source of all wisdom for continual guidance,—is not yet prepared for his work. He needs to take another survey of its magnitude, its difficulties, and its never-ending results. Such thoughts as these, Mr. Editor, crowd into my mind, when I think of complying with your request, to prepare a short article for your forthcoming

Annual. May He who giveth wisdom, and upbraideth not, enable me to write that which shall not be wholly useless!

You request me to say something *on the importance of a thorough and adequate course of preparatory study for the holy Ministry*. This is a subject on which I have had occasion, more than once, to lay some observations before the public. But, as these observations may have been seen by few; and as this is a subject on which frequent enlargement, and even repetition, are by no means objectionable; I dare not decline the service to which you have invited me. It will readily occur to you, however, that the limits of a few pages, to which I am necessarily confined, will preclude the possibility of doing more than glancing, in a very cursory manner, at a few topics, instead of attempting a course of regular discussion.

It is truly lamentable, that, in a day of so much literary improvement, when the number of those who may be called *educated* men, in the community, is every year increasing; and when all the talents and knowledge, as well as piety which ministers of the Gospel can possibly bring to bear on the duties of their profession are put in the most solemn requisition; I say it is truly lamentable in such a day as this, that it should be found so difficult to impress candidates for the sacred office with a just sense of adequate training for their ministerial work. Yet such is, undeniably, the melancholy fact. It is impossible not to see, that a very large majority of the whole number, content themselves with an education *superficial* through-

out. Their academic and collegial courses are both, in a multitude of cases, hurried over with a haste which precludes the possibility of accurate and mature scholarship. When they come to their theological studies, they find, to their surprise and embarrassment, that they are by no means prepared to go forward; that the miserable scantiness of their literary and scientific acquisitions really interposes a most serious obstacle in the way of their advantageous progress; and that to some of the richest stores of professional knowledge, they are altogether denied access. In these circumstances, instead of feeling impelled by the defects of their *academic course*, to pursue more at leisure, and to a greater extent, their *theological studies*; their decision is, in many cases, *directly the reverse!* They seem to suppose that, as they have not information enough to enable them to enter with intelligence on several important departments of theological study, they had better omit them altogether, and go forth at once into the field of public labour. The consequence is, they are, in a great measure, unqualified to serve the Church as *writers*. They must, of necessity, make inferior *preachers*. If they attempt to sit down as stated *pastors*, they soon expend their scanty store of knowledge, and cease to interest the people; and even if they go forth as *missionaries*, whether in the foreign or domestic field, their capacity to benefit their fellow-men, and to extend the Redeemer's kingdom, will generally be found to be abridged in proportion to the scantiness of their acquirements.

I am far, indeed, from asserting that no one ought

ever to be set apart to the work of the Ministry who is not entitled to the character of a *learned man*; and far less, that a *cold and heartless erudition* will itself fit any man to be an acceptable or useful occupant of the sacred office. All experience proves that without decided, ardent piety, no one is qualified, either to his own comfort, or to the probable advantage of others, to minister in holy things. And if a man, in addition to *such* piety, possesses strong good sense, practical wisdom, aptness to teach, and exemplary zeal; even though he have not enjoyed the plenary advantage of what may be called a *liberal education*; such a man may, I have no doubt, in many cases, and with great advantage to the Church, be introduced to the Gospel Ministry. Men of this class have often been eminently useful; and it would certainly be carrying the doctrine of the necessity of regular study to an extreme, to shut out such persons from the sacred office. Still, in every such case, the want of adequate knowledge ought to be regarded by the individual himself, and by all his friends,—and *will* be regarded by both,—if they have good sense,—as a *serious disadvantage*, to which nothing short of *necessity* should induce him to submit; and which can scarcely fail to abridge, and, in all probability, very materially, the usefulness as well as the comfort of all his ministrations.

It is deeply to be deplored, that, in taking this course, and in incurring these disadvantages, candidates for the Ministry are often encouraged by the advice of those who ought to give them better counsel. If it were in all cases a mere puerile mistake, flowing from youthful

impetuosity, and want of experience, we might look upon it with more indulgence. But this is by no means the case. Venerable Presbyteries either give it their direct countenance, or cannot be prevailed upon to set their faces with sufficient firmness against it. And thus it happens every day, that short sighted or infatuated young men,—either for want of adequate warning, or setting the most solemn warning at naught;—urged on, sometimes by inconsiderate friends, and at other times by their own impatience, ascend the pulpit, and undertake to teach others, while they need to be taught themselves “the first principles of the oracles of God;”—that, amidst all the rich advantages in pursuing Theological studies with which the candidate for the Ministry is now surrounded;—amidst the multiplied facilities which Theological Seminaries, and other allied recent improvements, offer to the diligent student of sacred knowledge;—the humiliating fact will, I fear, be found to be, that the mass of Presbyterian Ministers, at the present day, are by no means better, *if so well* furnished for their work, as those who entered the sacred office prior to the existence of these facilities. If this be so, the fact, and the reasons of it, are worthy of our most serious consideration.

It will be my aim, in what remains of this paper, to endeavour to impress upon the mind of every reader *the exceeding great importance of having the preparatory studies of candidates for the holy Ministry mature and adequate*. And, although the argument will be made up of elements so self-evident that it seems difficult to

make them plainer to a thinking mind; yet, for the sake of those for whom demonstration itself must often be repeated before it can make an impression;—it may be useful to repeat thoughts which ought, long since, to have been adopted as *first principles*, by every one claiming the least portion of Christian intelligence.

I. The great importance of careful and mature preparatory study in candidates for the Ministry, appears *from the nature and importance of that public service which the sacred office demands*. Multitudes of secular men, and too many who are turning their eyes to the Gospel Ministry, seem, indeed, to think that the professional studies of a minister may be brought within a very narrow compass. In fact, they seem to imagine that a serious perusal of the English Bible; of some one systematic work on Theology; and of some respectable ecclesiastical history,—is quite enough to prepare any man for the pulpit. All that can be said of such persons is, that they betray an ignorance as wonderful as it is disreputable. As well might a man dream that he was qualified to be a physician, by the perusal of some single popular work on the healing art; or a lawyer, by reading a course of law lectures, on general principles. Surely such calculators never penetrated beyond the surface of any single question in Biblical or Theological inquiry. What is the work which a minister of the Gospel is called to perform? Is it not to *explain the Bible* to his fellow men? Is it not to unfold, illustrate, defend and apply the doctrines and duties, of

that Bible for the benefit of all whom he addresses? Is it not to solve the difficulties which occur in the Scriptures, to reconcile seeming contradictions, and to unfold the riches of the sacred Volume? Is it not to refute error, in all its mazes; to establish truth, in all its extent; to convince gainsayers; to instruct and relieve the perplexed and doubting; in a word, to be ready to meet all inquirers, and all opposers, and to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine?" But is it possible, it may be asked, to perform these duties with any intelligence and success, without a large amount of various and digested knowledge? Can any man discharge them thoroughly, or even in any reputable degree, without being familiar with the original languages of Scripture; with Biblical History; with Biblical Antiquities; with the general principles and details of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation;—without being well acquainted with Didactic and Polemic Theology, in all their diversified and interesting branches, including the Deistical controversy, the Unitarian Controversy, the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian Controversies, to say nothing of many other departments of this boundless subject? Nay, further;—is any man prepared to discharge these duties either acceptably to his Master, to the honour of his office, or to the acceptance of those to whom he ministers, without a familiar acquaintance with the History and Government of the Church, the structure and composition of Sermons, the Pastoral care, and a variety of other subjects which cannot be minutely specified?—

Now when we recollect that all these branches of study are indispensable; that they ought *all* to be made objects of attention by every candidate for the holy Ministry; that he is really not prepared even to *begin* his work, as an interpreter of Scripture, and as a professional counsellor and guide of immortal souls, without some good acquaintance with every one of them;—is it possible for any one who knows what study and knowledge mean, to think of gaining any valuable acquaintance with these various and extensive departments of knowledge, in less than three or four years of diligent application? It is impossible. They are subjects in respect to which no talents can supersede the necessity of patient and protracted labour. Nay, it is evident that a tolerably comprehensive acquaintance with *any one* of them, cannot be acquired, by the finest mind, without months of devoted study. Take, for example, the *Pelagian* or the *Arminian* controversy, and ask any thinking man who has the least idea of the nature, extent, and importance of these portions of Polemic Theology, how long it will take a student of the best powers so far to master them, as to be prepared to go forth to resist error in its various artful mazes, and establish truth;—and he will reply that, to gain and digest such knowledge, a number of months, diligently employed, will not be more than sufficient for each subject. He, then, who thinks so far to master them *all*, as to be prepared to be “a teacher in the house of God,” at little expense of time and toil, labours under a delusion which would be a proper subject of ridicule only, were it not so destruc-

tive in its consequences to the most precious interests of men.

If there be, then, in the bosom of the Church a melancholy spectacle, it is that of a rash, self-confident young man, who presses forward to the awful station of a spiritual teacher, when he has not been taught himself; who is not qualified, perhaps, to illustrate and guard a single point in Theology; who, of course, *must* be a superficial preacher; and who cannot fail of being liable to all the crude thinking, and the doctrinal inconsistencies and aberrations, which so frequently mark the character of those who thus prematurely intrude into the sacred office. How it is, that young men, apparently conscientious, can deliberately consent to go forth as public instructors in the Church of Christ; to open and apply the Scriptures; to meet and confute the learned sceptic; to silence the ingenious caviller, not by sanctimonious authority, but by sound argument; to solve delicate and momentous questions of casuistry; to counsel the anxious, the perplexed, the tempted, and the doubting; and adapt themselves to all the variety of characters and duties which a large congregation presents,—while they are, comparatively, children, both in *knowledge* and *experience*;—is indeed wonderful, and as humiliating as it is wonderful!

When the illustrious *Calvin* had published the first edition of his great work on the “Institutions of the Christian Religion,”—when *Joseph Scaliger* supposes him to have been the most learned man in *Europe*, and when he was importuned and finally constrained to set-

tle as a pastor in *Geneva*, he was actually on his way to *Strasburg*, for the purpose of further pursuing his theological studies, under the impression that he had not yet obtained mature Scriptural knowledge enough to warrant his undertaking the stated exercise of the pastoral office. What an impressive comment on the presumptuous readiness with which too many young men, in modern times, venture on the arduous and awful labours of the Gospel Ministry, with furniture so slender and inadequate, that they cannot be said to be safe and intelligent teachers on almost any subject!

II. A further and very important argument in favour of mature preparatory study is, that *very few who do not lay a good foundation in the beginning, ever supply the deficiency afterwards.*

Many candidates for the Ministry, no doubt, content themselves with what they acknowledge to be a *short* and very *superficial* course of study at the outset, because they imagine they will have an ample opportunity of supplying all deficiencies after entering on their official work. They flatter themselves that, after they have actually entered the field of public labour, they will have, at once, better facilities, and stronger excitements to study, than they now enjoy; and that, then, they will make up, and more than make up, whatever may now be wanting. But it is easy to show that this expectation generally proves, in fact, and in most cases *must* prove, altogether delusive. Candidates for the Ministry may rely upon it, that if they leave the Theo-

logical Seminary, or their preparatory studies wherever pursued, with a mere smattering of theological knowledge—with what they know and confess to be a scanty and inadequate foundation, there is every probability that they will go through life, and to their graves with very little more. The superstructure concerning which they fondly anticipate so much, will pretty certainly be always of the same miserable, scanty, insufficient character with the foundation.

For, in the first place, if a candidate for the Ministry have so little thirst after knowledge, so little love of study, so little energy and decision of character, as to content himself with small and superficial acquirements in his preparatory course, when he has so fair an opportunity, and such powerful stimulants to apply his mind to the acquisition of necessary furniture;—will he be likely to undergo an essential revolution in this respect, immediately on reaching the field of public labour? Will he be likely, at once, to gain a new spirit, more warmly and successfully devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, when both his means and his opportunities for attending to this object, will be far less favourable than before? Nothing can be more unreasonable than such an expectation. No; there is a moral certainty that he who, in the ardour of youthful pursuit, has not a sufficiently deep impression of the importance of knowledge, to make sacrifices for its attainment, and sufficient force of character to overcome the obstacles which lie in the way of the attainment;—will never be likely, in after life, to surmount these obstructions, and make the acquisition.

Besides, let it be recollected, that when a youthful minister of Christ, at the present day, goes forth to serve the Church,—if he have talents, and be popular—as each individual hopes will be the case concerning himself;—and especially if he have ardent piety, and a heart to perform his work with zeal; he will have so much to do; will be so incessantly called upon in every direction; in a word, will have his heart and hands so completely filled with public and private engagements—preaching—visiting from house to house—attending protracted, and other special meetings for promoting the Redeemer's kingdom—and all the multiplied, and almost countless details of duty to which the zealous minister of Christ is called in this day of Christian zeal and enterprise;—that, instead of having time to make up for former deficiencies in study he will scarcely be able, by every effort, to redeem time enough to keep pace, in ever so imperfect a manner, with the cursory literature of the day, and to prepare, even hastily and superficially, for the pulpit. And, what is worthy of the particular notice of such a young man—the more ardent his piety, and the more animated, interesting, and popular his preaching—the more numerous will be his calls to public and private service; and, of course, the more incessant will be his interruptions, and the more difficult he will find it to redeem even a few hours in each week for composed retirement and study. The consequence is, that nine out of ten, perhaps nineteen out of twenty, of those who engage in preaching with very slender furniture, go through the whole of their ministerial life with lean,

unfurnished minds. Their "profiting does not appear to all." Not having the *habit* of close study, it is not easy to begin. They hope for much, and promise much in the way of future improvement, but never find time for it. Hence, when they enter the pulpit, they are neither instructive nor interesting as preachers. The small and lean stock with which they begin is soon exhausted. Their popular acceptance soon declines or ceases. The people are not "fed by them" with knowledge and understanding. Congregations dwindle away, and sometimes perish, under their feeble and unedifying Ministry. Premature dotage creeps on; and the latter portion of their lives, perhaps, becomes rather a burden than a blessing to the Church. It is truly melancholy to think how often this has been the real history of ministers who entered the sacred office without proper furniture, and who, for want of time or inclination afterwards, never made up their early deficiency. Indeed, from the very nature of the case, this *must necessarily* be the result with regard to many. For, let it ever be remembered—and on the ear and heart of every candidate for the Ministry, the statement ought to fall with solemn weight—no minister ever yet kept together and edified a congregation, for any length of time, who did not, as a habit, preach *instructively*;—who did not "feed the people" with *Scriptural knowledge*. Even *Whitefield*, with all the fervour of his zeal, and all the wonderful impressiveness of his matchless eloquence—could not possibly have settled as a stated pastor, among an intelligent people, with any advantage. Of this, he was

himself aware, and often confessed it with sensibility and humiliation. His early studies had been hasty and superficial; and his ministerial life had been one of almost unequalled activity. He had little time for study from the day of his ordination to the day of his death. His sermons, though highly eloquent, bore the marks of this fact: and when the novelty of his eloquence had worn off in a particular place, his audiences became gradually less crowded, until he was admonished to take his leave of them for a time, and not to return until such an interval had elapsed as that he could again appear among them under the advantage of a degree of novelty.

But even supposing that he who enters on the holy Ministry with slender furniture, should afterwards be determined, whatever it may cost him, to make up his deficiency by unwearied and extra efforts. Still his task will be difficult, and his prospect gloomy. He can take only one of two courses, either of which will probably be fatal. He may attempt, amidst all his multiplied and arduous labours, by *night studies*, and by urging nature in every way, beyond her strength—to gain that which he ought to have acquired before he entered the pulpit. In taking *this* course, he will, pretty certainly, *destroy his health*, and either sink into a premature grave, or reduce himself, for the remainder of his days, to a state of languor and protracted disease, which will render existence a burden, and all comfortable and efficient discharge of duty impossible. Or, the delinquent in question may choose another alternative.

He may, after entering on the Ministry, confine himself to his study; neglecting family visitation; neglecting family instruction; neglecting the anxious inquirer; neglecting the sick and the dying; neglecting all the calls of Christian enterprize and benevolence; in short, neglecting, or slighting all pastoral duties, excepting those of the pulpit. The consequences of adopting this alternative, may be even still more deplorable than in the former case. While the other course would, probably, be fatal to his health, this would be *fatal to his usefulness*, fatal to his *official character*, fatal to the best interests of *the precious souls committed to his charge*.

But it will be asked—Have not individuals been frequently known, who entered the office of the holy Ministry with very small theological furniture; but who, afterwards, by very extraordinary efforts, became not only respectably, but some of them even richly furnished for their work? I answer, such instances have now and then occurred. But they have been, generally, men of peculiar intellectual vigour and perseverance; of great decision of character; and placed in circumstances which in a great measure exempted them from the daily and hourly calls of pastoral duty. They have almost always, too, been men who had not enjoyed the advantage of ample study in early life. Of one who *had* enjoyed this advantage, but neglected it, and entered the Ministry with small furniture, and subsequently became studious and learned—I never knew an example; and must entirely doubt whether such an example ever occurred.

III. The great importance of regular and mature training for the holy Ministry is manifest *from the peculiar state and wants of our country.*

It will readily be understood that those who are entrusted with immediate care of Theological Seminaries, have opportunities of perceiving and appreciating this consideration, which are in some measure peculiar to themselves. To *them* applications for candidates, both for pastoral and missionary service, are continually sent, from almost every part of the United States, accompanied with descriptions of the places and population for which the candidates are needed, and of the qualifications deemed requisite for filling to advantage the places specified. It is almost incredible to those who have not seen the contents of such communications as I have described, how frequently, not to say generally, they represent competent *learning*, as well as *talents* and *piety*, as being indispensable in the stations which it is designed to fill. They tell us, in so many cases, that it may be considered, without error, as the general strain of representation, even from the remotest country villages,—that the man who would suit, must be a well-informed and instructive preacher, as well as pious, zealous, and prudent. They tell us, that the specified settlement, though new and immature, contains a large number of acute, active, observing men, lawyers, physicians, merchants, whose taste and character demand intelligent, as well as sound instruction from the sacred desk. It would be painful to disclose in how many cases theological Professors have been obliged to reply

to such applications, that, although they were able to name a number of candidates who were disengaged, they could not select an individual of the whole list who could really be said to be adapted to the place and service described. Young men we had, and in some instances, in considerable numbers; but few or none, unengaged fit to be sent to such scenes of labour; and so we were obliged to inform our importunate applicants. The truth is, many of the principal people in these remote districts desire—and it is surely a reasonable wish—that the ministers sent to them should be qualified to take the lead in all the ecclesiastical organizations and proceedings, not merely of a single Church, but of several neighbouring churches, starting into life and activity; to be the counsellors and guides of townships, and sometimes, perhaps, of counties; to mould a heterogeneous population into a harmonious and comfortable mass; to give advice, go forward, and command respect in difficult and delicate cases; and to take an active part in promoting sound *literature* as well as *religion*, in the respective neighbourhoods in which they may be placed. Indeed to much of this work every minister,—even every itinerant missionary is called; and it is of the utmost importance that he be able to perform it with acceptance and usefulness. And *that* candidate for the sacred office who is either too lazy, or too narrow minded to take the requisite pains to qualify himself for these various and momentous duties, may think himself very conscientious, and may give himself great credit for being moderate, humble, and disinterested in

his views; but he is an infatuated man. He is not merely under a mistake;—he is unfaithful to himself, to the Church, and to the Master whom he professes to love.

Had I, therefore, an opportunity of addressing all the theological students in the United States, I would say to them—Look abroad, beloved youth, upon this nation, in all its settlements, in the length and breadth of them! Contemplate the number, the character, and the wants of our population. Behold the melancholy reign of ignorance and vice. Contemplate the learning, the boldness, and the industry of heresy on every side. Mark well the prevalence, the unwearied diligence, and the eloquence of infidelity. Think how much digested knowledge, as well as able and powerful preaching, is called for by the shrewd and hostile millions within our widely extended territory. Advert for a moment to the mighty influence which the press is destined to exert over this people, and how deadly that influence must be, if not guided and sanctified by the religion of Jesus Christ. Think of the interests of sound *literature* as well as of *piety*. Count the number of the youth who are to be trained up either for usefulness and heaven, or for profligacy and perdition. Ponder well the necessities of our *Seminaries of learning*, if they are to be made a blessing, and not a curse. Look at these things, beloved candidates for the holy Ministry, and consider seriously what must be the consequence, without a series of miracles, unless the young soldiers now coming forward to the service of the Church, take

care to be adequately instructed and girded for the mighty war before them ; and if your "spirit is not stirred within you" by the sight, to take high aims in preparing for your work ; to aspire to elevated attainments in knowledge and in piety, you are but ill fitted for this age, or for the office which you seek.

With these impressions, when I see young men, under the notion of serving the Church, and of supplying the urgent demand for ministers, prematurely, and without proper furniture, pressing into the pulpit, instead of rejoicing, I mourn. They may have pious intentions, and may sincerely think they are promoting the welfare of the Church ; but they are preparing, in all probability, to inflict upon it a real injury. They may think "the Lord hath need of them." But they are deceived. The Lord is a God of order, and not of confusion, in all his churches. He has never made mental imbecility, ignorance, rashness, and incompetence, proper qualifications for doing his work. If "the Lord had need of them," he would not only open the door for their entrance into his service, but would also prepare them for the service in which they engaged.

IV. The great importance of mature study, and thorough training for the holy Ministry, is manifest *from the predominant influence which the PRESS exerts, and seems destined in a still higher degree, to exert, in every part of our country.*

No intelligent observer of the passing age, can possibly fail of marking the power of the press, in reaching,

informing, and controlling the whole mass of our citizens. Never, since human society existed, were the productions of the human mind, in so many diversified forms, so widely diffused among men, as at the present time. He who is able to write in a popular and impressive manner, can now, through the medium of the press, speak, in a short time, to almost the whole civilized population of the globe; instructing the ignorant, impressing the careless, and uniting in sentiment and action countless thousands whose faces he can never see in the flesh, and thousands who may live long after he is dead. And as the facilities for extending this method of communication are every day increasing, so the power of the accomplished writer to benefit his fellow-men, is becoming every day more rich, precious, and durable. Happy is that man who is qualified to write in such a manner as to be able to send the means of promoting sound principles, and holy living through all ranks of society to the ends of the earth. If I wished to give such counsel to a beloved son, as I should think adapted to prepare him for the very *maximum* of usefulness in the Church of God, I would certainly exhort him, next to the cultivation of ardent piety, to labour to the utmost, and without ceasing, to become one of the most ready and able writers in the land.

But can any one be ignorant that the possession in any good degree of this accomplishment, must necessarily be the result of mature study, and of indefatigable labour? "*Reading*," said Lord Chancellor *Bacon*, "makes a full man; *conversation* a ready man; *writing* an exact

man." Nothing brings to a more severe test the soundness of a man's original literary training, the accuracy of his knowledge, the clearness of his conceptions, and the cultivation of his taste, than the manner in which he acquits himself as a *writer*. Here, if he be not a real scholar, if his knowledge be not sound and digested, his ideas distinct and clear, and his taste just, he cannot possibly manifest high excellence. Without these qualifications, he may really be said to labour under an entire disability to do much good to his fellow men in this way. And, of course, he who voluntarily incurs this disability, may be said voluntarily to curtail his own power to serve his generation, and to honour the best of Masters.

Accordingly, it is truly humiliating to observe how small is the number of Ministers in the United States, who manifest any thing like high excellence in the great and precious power of addressing their fellow-men through the medium of the press. Though this accomplishment is so evidently one of inestimable importance; though it bears a high price in the market; and though there is scarcely any way in which a man is so likely, on a great scale, to serve God and his generation; still, the mortifying fact is notorious, that there is a great scarcity of this kind of accomplishment; nay, that many important theological and ecclesiastical publications of the periodical class, are almost obliged to stand still for want of writers of sufficient excellence to sustain them with vigour and spirit. While a large portion of the periodical press is in the hands of infidels and errorists,

who can command sufficient literary aid almost at pleasure; the friends of evangelical religion find it almost impossible to carry on such journals as their cause demands, in a manner which at all becomes their cause. And in the midst of this lamentable deficiency, how few appear to be pursuing that course of study, and submitting to that patient and laborious culture of their faculties which become those who feel bound to exert their utmost strength in serving their Maker and their fellow-men! Never was there a country in which there were, at once, so many opportunities and inducements to promote the temporal and eternal welfare of mankind by good writing as in the United States: and it may be safely said, that there is no department of Christian effort more likely to prove a permanent blessing to the human race; and in which he who is capable of excelling is presented with a greater range of usefulness than that which is now under consideration; and which, at the same time, so many, if they do not weakly undervalue, do most criminally neglect.

V. Ample and mature preparatory study is of exceeding great importance to a candidate for the holy ministry, as *a substitute for that experience which cannot be possessed in the outset of an ecclesiastical course; and for the general formation of the character.*

Many seem to imagine that the only use of a regular and complete course of preparatory study is *the mere attainment of knowledge.* And, therefore, when a candidate for the ministry, after completing his academic

career, is exhorted to spend three or more years in diligent theological study, it is thought, by many serious people, to be almost a criminal sacrifice to *mere learning*. But such persons forget that the discipline of the mind, and the formation of the general character, are among the most important parts of professional preparation. They forget that even if the requisite amount of facts and principles could be crowded into the mind of a young man in six months, or even in six weeks, still one essential object of theological education would be unattained; which is *casting the whole man*, if I may be allowed the expression, *into the proper mould for a minister of religion*. This includes the correction of bad habits; the formation of new and better ones; the gradual discipline and ripening of the intellectual powers; mellowing, softening, and at the same time invigorating the graces of the heart; bringing down high thoughts of himself; ascertaining his own defects and foibles; learning the value of gravity, self-command, prudence, and Christian dignity; studying human nature and the world; in short, unlearning many things which he had learned amiss, and correcting many erroneous views, and juvenile propensities, which nothing but time, and suitable associations, accompanied with much observation, watchfulness, prayer, and conflict can possibly, under God, enable him to accomplish. Suppose a young man to be about to engage in a course of study preparatory to the gospel Ministry. Suppose him to have lively, and vigorous talents, and unfeigned piety;—but at the same time to be rash, impetuous, indiscreet, ignorant of the

world, elated with ideas of his own powers and importance, and ready on all occasions, without conferring with age or experience, to dash forward for the attainment of his object. Now, if such a young man had read all the books in the world, and heard and transcribed all the learned lectures that ever were delivered, he would still be unfit to go forth as a Minister of the Gospel; to be a teacher, an example, and a guide in the Church of God. He needs the friendly hints, the fraternal counsel, the faithful admonitions of those who have lived longer than himself. He needs to be taught by experience, and sometimes by very painful experience; to be rebuked, and mortified, and humbled again and again, before he can be brought to "think soberly" of himself, to feel his own defects and foibles, to act with a habitual regard to the feelings of others, to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." In a word, he needs that kind of intellectual and moral discipline, which results from being frequently brought into contact with various forms of Christian society, while he is consulting at his leisure the best books. It is plain that all this is not, in ordinary cases, to be acquired in a year, or in two years. It is usually a slow process, and requires time and patience. Yet, with many, this discipline, is far more needed, and far more important, than mere learning. The want of it is their most radical and prominent defect; and will be likely, perhaps, if continued, more than any other, (next to a defect in piety) to interfere with their acceptance, their comfort, and their usefulness, to the end of life.

After all the provision which has been made by our Church for ample ministerial training, I feel constrained to say, that there is scarcely a more obvious and deplorable evil among her rising ministry, at the present day, than the slenderness of furniture with which many go forth, united, as such deficiency is too apt to be, with a spirit of self-confidence, rashness, contempt for age and experience, and headstrong obstinacy in the adoption and persevering use of new modes of preaching, in propagating plausible forms of error, and in denouncing a wise regard to ecclesiastical order as pharisaical formality. We have reason to be thankful that this self-sufficient and turbulent spirit, though found in too many instances, is by no means a *prevalent* one among the mass of our candidates. If it *were*, the prospect would be indeed gloomy; or rather, there would be no rational hope for the Church short of a *revolution*, which should at once convulse and purify it. Now against these aberrations, piety itself, even ardent piety, is not always a sufficient defence: for the stronger the conviction on the part of a deeply conscientious youth of the rectitude of a certain course, with the more decision and ardour will he, of course, pursue it.

If we would cure such an one of his errors, and reclaim him from his wanderings; we must *inform his mind*; we must *read to him the experience of former ages*; we must prevail upon him to pause, to inquire, and to avail himself of the knoweledge accumulated by the Church from her very mistakes, convulsions and disorders. In nineteen cases out of twenty, when pious young ministers

have given way to extravagance and fanaticism; when they have spurned the counsels of age and experience; and grieved the hearts of intelligent and sober Christians, by patronizing enthusiasm and disorder; they will be found to be among the ignorant and superficial; who have pressed forward prematurely into the field of public labour; who know little of theology; little of the structure and history of the Church of Christ; still less of human nature, and the human heart; and least of all of themselves. This is so generally the case, that when I hear of a young man who is peculiarly forward and arrogant in his ecclesiastical spirit; who claims to be *peculiarly skilled in originating and conducting Revivals*; who sneers at the counsels of wiser and better men than himself, and denounces as graceless, or at least as cold, all who are not willing at once to unite with him in his extravagance; I take for granted, without further inquiry, that he is a young man of small information; that he has been intoxicated by the flattery of those who were as superficial and injudicious as himself; that he is a mass of inflated ignorance, and spiritual pride; and that instead of being a guide, in spiritual things peculiarly *well skilled and safe*, as he and his partial friends suppose, he is peculiarly unfit to be trusted in any thing that requires the exercise of genuine sanctified wisdom. I have very seldom met with a case which formed an exception to this remark. All the patrons of enthusiasm, extravagance and disorder that I have ever personally known, were either sciolists in knowledge, or men of remarkably weak minds, and, more generally, both toge-

ther. The various practical inferences, which may legitimately be drawn from this statement, I leave to others; but the fact is, a self-sufficient, inflated, thorough-going advocate of fanatical measures of any kind, who was at the same time a man of mature study, and a well informed theologian, I never saw, or heard of. Hence I infer, that leisurly and careful study; setting out in ecclesiastical life with a solid mass of digested knowledge; is one of the best guards against these deplorable evils. This leads me to observe,

VI Finally; That the importance of mature study and thorough training for the sacred office, *is powerfully and uniformly attested by the history of the Church.*

To trace the leading facts on this subject, would require a volume instead of a few pages. They all, however, when carefully examined, will be found to establish the general principle, that at any and every period, the better informed the clergy were in Biblical and theological knowledge, the more exemplary was their sacred character,—the more pure and elevated their piety, and the more extensive their usefulness. The most learned of the Apostles, we know, was the most eminently useful of the whole number. And the same general principle has been strikingly exemplified in all ages. It cannot be said, indeed, that ministers of the Gospel have been always and invariably useful in direct proportion to their *learning*. Some remarkable instances of learned heretics, and of learned drones and formalists, have, no doubt disgraced the ministerial office; and instead of

proving blessings to the Church, have rather been perverters of the truth, and obstacles to the progress of the Gospel. But the *converse* of this statement, cannot, assuredly be maintained; that is, it cannot be said of any pastor, or missionary, who was remarkably *ignorant, however pious*, that he was extensively and permanently useful. Such an one may have been the means of doing some little good, for a short time, and in a narrow sphere; but extensively useful he never was. The annals of the Christian Church afford no such instance. The fact is from the days of Paul to this hour, those ministers who, to exemplary piety, and ardent zeal, added sound and mature learning, have been in all ages and countries the most eminently blessed and useful in their generation.

This principle was strikingly exemplified in the lives and character of the *Reformers*. In those holy men, who were most eminently instrumental in stripping off the mask from popery, in exposing the erroneous corruptions of the man of sin, and holding forth the "light of life" to a dark world, we see the value of learning to the Gospel Ministry displayed in the most impressive manner. It may be maintained, without hesitation, as a general fact, that the most learned of their number, were the most richly and extensively useful; and that, humanly speaking, had their knowledge been less, the blessings which, under God, they were instrumental in conferring on the Church, and on distant generations would have been far less rich, vital and permanent than they were. Nay, it is not saying too much to assert that, had not

the leading Reformers been men amply furnished with human and divine knowledge, they could not possibly have rendered those incalculable services to the cause of Christ, which altered the face of Christendom; which sent blessings to the ends of the earth; and in which we have yet reason to rejoice. The accomplishments of which we speak were those which enabled those great and good men to translate and expound the Scriptures; to explain and defend the precious doctrines of the Gospel; to meet the learning of the most corrupt Romanists with still sounder learning; to repel their plausible logic, with logic still more legitimate and powerful; to expose the emptiness of their "philosophy falsely so called," by sounder views of genuine philosophy; to exhibit the real character of the heresies and superstitions which they opposed, by tracing their history, as well as exposing their native tendency and effects; and thus to command the confidence, and guide the opinions of thousands who never saw their faces in the flesh.

Even in the case of *missionaries*, the principle for which we contend has been, with scarcely an exception, remarkably illustrated and confirmed. Whose labours, among this class, have been most remarkably blessed to the conversion of the heathen? Undoubtedly, those who, to fervent piety, united a competent store of literature and science, and especially an intimate acquaintance with the Bible, and with Gospel truth. If any doubt of this, let them think of the labours and usefulness of such men as *Eliot*, and *Brainerd*, and *Spangenberg*, and *Vanderkemp*, and *Swartz*, and *Buchanan*, and *Martyn*,

and *Carey*, and *Ward*—not to speak of a number more whose names will instantly occur to every well informed reader;—and then ask, whether it had been possible for those holy and devoted men to accomplish what they did, if they had been illiterate and ignorant, however ardent and devoted their Christian feelings? The very suggestion is absurd. We might as well expect men according to the unreasonable demand of the Egyptian task-masters, to “make brick without straw.” The most permanent and truly valuable part of the services which they rendered to the cause of the Redeemer, were precisely those which their *sanctified learning* enabled them to accomplish, and which, had they been illiterate men, might, of course, have entirely failed. When we read the deeply interesting memoirs of these men, and especially those of *Buchanan* and *Martyn*, we perceive at once that their indefatigable devotion to study in the University, was so far from having been lost upon them, even in their missionary labours, that it all turned to important account. It served to invigorate and enlarge their minds; to prepare them for the more easy and thorough acquisition of every subsequent attainment; and thus greatly to extend their usefulness. Neither of these men could possibly have shone so brightly in his oriental Ministry, had it not been for his diligent and successful labours in the University.

The foregoing statements are all confirmed by the history of the most useful divines and pastors of our own country. It may be confidently asserted, that ever since evangelical churches have had an existence

on this side the Atlantic, those ministers of the Gospel in whom fervent piety, and ample theological furniture were most remarkably united, have been, invariably, the most eminently useful. They have had a weight of influence which no others could acquire. They have diffused around them a degree of light, as well as warmth, which less accomplished men could never have imparted. And they have been enabled to give an impulse to the public mind, and to correct prevailing disorders and abuses, to an extent which rendered them great public benefactors; but which, without their learning, would have been impracticable, unless by the intervention of miracle.

Do any ask, in what manner the history of the Church represents the want of mature knowledge in ministers as having interfered with their usefulness? The answer is as ready as it is multiform and decisive. When ministers have had little knowledge themselves, it was impossible for them to impart much instruction to others. They were found unable to "feed the people with knowledge and with understanding." Those to whom they ministered soon discovered their ignorance; felt that they were not fed; became tired of their preaching; lost their respect for them; neglected their ministrations; and, perhaps, gradually, withdrew from the house of God altogether, and became totally regardless of religion. Thus, instead of being a rich blessing to the Church of God, such ministers, as was remarked under a former head, have frequently become a stumbling block, a burden, and a curse to it. Nor does the

history of the Church represent the evils of the want of suitable furniture in ministers as having been confined to the people to whom they ministered. This deficiency has proved, in innumerable instances, as injurious to *themselves* as to others. They have been made the dupes and tools of designing men, who had more knowledge, and who wished to render them subservient to their sinister designs. Or they have been, before they were aware of it, entangled in the deplorable toils of childish superstition, or wild enthusiasm; and thus, becoming "blind leaders of the blind," they have contracted more guilt, and done more injury to that hallowed cause which they professed to serve, than it was possible by human arithmetic to estimate. The truth is, a man who has but a smattering of indigested knowledge, however pious, *must* be, as all experience has evinced, not only an *incompetent* guide, but also an *unsafe* one. In a day of commotion and trial, he knows not what to do. He is ready to adopt every novel project which ignorance, vanity, or a spirit of innovation may propose. The results of former experience and wisdom are, of course, lost upon him, for the best of all reasons, because he knows them not. The consequence is, that, in all his movements, he betrays total incompetence to the work which he undertakes. He draws down upon himself the deep regrets, if not the unmingled contempt of the wise and the good around him. And the Church, instead of having reason to bless him, as her leader, guide, and benefactor, has reason rather to weep over his character and labours, however well

intended, as really, taken in the aggregate, so much thrown into the scale of the adversary.

Such, beyond all doubt, is the testimony of unvarnished history on the subject before us. It teaches, on the one hand, that *unsanctified knowledge* has always been a curse to the Church—leading to pride, ambition, unhallowed speculation, heresy, strife, and every evil work. And it teaches, on the other hand, with no less distinctness, that *ignorance never was nor can be sanctified*, that an ignorant or superficially informed Ministry, never can be either a respectable or useful one; that it must either sink down into miserable, inert, un-instructive insignificance and unfaithfulness; or betray into vanity, empty rant, enthusiasm, and endless disorder. Nothing but the *union of fervent piety, and sound learning*, can possibly secure to any Christian Ministry, for any length of time together, the precious results of true respectability, and genuine evangelical usefulness.

Seeing that the voice of all history is so unequivocal, loud and solemn on this subject, it has often filled me with the deepest astonishment, that candidates for the ministry, who have any acquaintance with that history, should yet be so slow to learn its plain and conclusive lessons. Such, however, is the demented course of many! They are so infatuated as to pass hastily and slightly over all their academical and collegial studies, and yet hope to have well disciplined and cultivated minds. They are so much in haste to get into the field of active labour, that they will not take the time or the pains to make themselves acquainted, even tolerably,

with the original languages of Scripture ; and yet are so unreasonable as to expect to be sound intelligent, and able expositors of the word of God. They spurn at the labours of studying didactic and polemic theology in a systematic manner, comparing system with system ; and yet irrationally dream, that they shall be able, by and by, to “ bring out of their treasure things new and old.”

They imagine that their little stinted, indigested, miserable pittance of acquirement will be sufficient to draw upon while they live, without any addition. Surely such youth set at defiance all reason, and all experience. When our Theological Seminaries were first established, the friends of a well qualified ministry were sanguine in their expectations, that theological education would rapidly rise to a high standard. It never entered into their minds, that when such ample and favourable opportunities of mature study were provided, any would be insane enough not to avail themselves of the provision. But, alas ! how grievously, not only in many instances, but in a great majority of instances, have such expectations been disappointed ! How difficult is it, after all, to persuade the larger portion of our candidates for the ministry, of the importance and necessity of ample furniture in those who bear the sacred office ! They read in every history of the Christian Church which they open, the deplorable consequences of ignorance and incompetence in the Gospel ministry. They cannot open their eyes on the ministers and Churches of the present day, without seeing the most humiliating effects arising from the

want of suitable training in those who have undertaken to be "watchmen on the walls of Zion." They cannot help seeing, if they look at all, that the minister who has but *small knowledge*, with few exceptions, must content himself with *small usefulness*. They ought to know, too, that the state of society in our country, as it advances in refinement and intelligence, is, every year, calling for more ample furniture in candidates for the sacred office. They ought, further, to remember, that Christian ministers of the present day are called upon more loudly than ever before, to serve the cause of Christ with their *pens*, as well as in the *pulpit*, in the *lecture-room*, and in the *pastoral visit*. And they ought to consider that they have opportunities of enlightening and influencing the public mind presented to them, such as no former generation of candidates for the Ministry ever enjoyed. They are, also, frequently and faithfully *warned* of the danger of immature study, and superficial knowledge; and entreated to avail themselves of the means placed within their reach, for preparing in the most advantageous manner, to serve the Church and their generation. But with respect to many,—alas! too many; all is in vain. Only a lamentably small portion can be prevailed upon, with all these considerations in view, to pursue the full course of study which the wisdom of the Church has prescribed. And even some who *do* consent, and profess, nominally, to go through that course, engage in study, for the most part, with so little zeal, and suffer themselves to be diverted from their

studies by so many distracting avocations, that but a small portion of the nominal time of study, is really, and in good earnest, devoted to its professed object.

I am not ignorant of the various pleas, by which those who act thus, in opposition to the clearest light of experience, attempt to justify their blind and infatuated conduct. They plead—the urgent need of ministers; the solicitations of their friends; their earnest desire to be in the field of labour; the inconvenience of obtaining the necessary means of support, in pursuing the usual course;—all these they plead with confidence and zeal. But such pleas are all delusive and vain. Those who offer them forget that it is no real blessing to the Church to multiply ignorant and incompetent ministers, but rather a curse; that, of course, if the call for more labourers were a hundred-fold more loud and importunate than it is, it would be worse than useless to the Church as well as to themselves, to go forth unfurnished “novices.” They forget that they have but one life to live: and that, if they allow themselves to launch forth unprepared, they may, and probably will, never be able to repair the mischief of this one premature step. O when will those beloved sons of the Church who have “a price put into their hands to get wisdom,” learn to value it correctly, and to improve it faithfully? I can only say, with respect to those who act otherwise, that, if they ever come to their senses, they will be ready, like *Peter*, to “go out and weep bitterly.”

I most earnestly wish, my dear Sir, that you could

adopt some means of infusing proper sentiments on this important subject into the minds of all the candidates taken up and patronized by your Board. It is of the utmost importance that something of this kind be done, if possible, at the *outset* of each young man's course. When candidates for the Ministry have completed their college career, and commence their theological studies, it is often too late to address them effectually in reference to this matter. Their whole elementary course, in the languages and sciences, has been so miserably superficial and inaccurate, that, unless they *go back and begin anew*, they never can proceed in their theological course, with any tolerable advantage. Young men, therefore, who have the Ministry in view, ought to *commence* their elementary studies under a deep conviction of the importance of every part of their *foundation* being laid in the most *careful* and *solid* manner. From the moment they take the Latin grammar in hand, they ought to be entreated not to *slight* any part of their work; and to make a point, whatever it may cost them, of being *exact* and *thorough* in every thing. This may give more trouble in the outset; but it will *save trouble* in the end. He who *begins* well, will proceed afterwards with more ease, more celerity, and more profit: whereas, he, whose studies in classic literature and in the sciences are lame and crude, may rely on it that he will be like a man with weights tied to his feet, which will, necessarily, impede his progress in every subsequent part of his journey. Let me entreat you, then, Mr. Editor, and through you,

all who have any thing to do with the Board of Education—to labour to impress the minds of your beneficiaries with a due sense of their obligations on this subject. I would respectfully propose, that you not only put into their hands sound and seasonable publications on the subject ; but that you, as far as possible, personally address each individual, and endeavour to reach his conscience in reference to the duty which I am labouring to recommend. Try to convince them, that whenever they pass over any subject which it is made their duty to study, in a hasty and superficial manner ; whenever they content themselves with stunted and imperfect knowledge, they *cheat themselves* ; they *cheat the Church*, by whose maternal bounty they are sustained ; they attempt to *cheat the great Head of the Church*, to whom they owe their best services. O that candidates for the Ministry could be persuaded to feel, that this is not a subject concerning which they are at liberty to “confer with flesh and blood ;” but that they are as much bound to *prepare themselves in the best possible manner to serve their Master in heaven*, as they are to pray, to study his word, or to believe in his name. And if any young man, after having the subject properly set before him, cannot be prevailed upon, to go through a regular and full course of study, both classical and theological, I, for one, am prepared to say that, from the moment this disposition is discovered, your Board ought to decline sustaining him. The pious young man who has gotten it into his head that zeal, without solid knowledge will answer for a minister of

the Gospel, ought at once to be told, that he will be much more likely to promote the cause of true religion as an industrious mechanic, or in some other secular employment, than as "an ambassador of Christ."

With many prayers for the success of your important Institution,

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours, &c.

SAMUEL MILLER.

Princeton, May 24th, 1832.









